

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 29

Article 5

4-1-2006

The Other Half of the Equation: Women Leaders in Jesuit Colleges and Universities

Mary E. Beadle

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Beadle, Mary E. (2006) "The Other Half of the Equation: Women Leaders in Jesuit Colleges and Universities," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 29, Article 5.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol29/iss1/5>

THE OTHER HALF OF THE EQUATION: WOMEN LEADERS IN JESUIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Where do we stand? An Analysis

By Mary E. Beadle

The status of women in higher education administration has been a concern since the 1970's. My interest in gender equity began early in my career. As a non-tenure track, term appointed, professor of communication, not only was I lacking a PhD., I was the only women in a department in a large public institution (1981-1985). Department meetings were often uncomfortable and the men would make deferential comments as if their language seemed "too rough." A woman faculty member in another department invited me to do a presentation with her about the "Chilly Climate for Women" on college campuses.

The communication profession and the educational organizations were dominated by men in the roles of leadership and power. Later, in my first tenured job, there were many more women faculty. It was a small religious-affiliated school, founded by a male order, which had no women in administrative positions when I began and one when I left in 1994. In 1990, I was the first women elected chair of the faculty.

In 1994, I came to John Carroll University (JCU) in Cleveland, Ohio. The communication department had a majority of women faculty and the student population was more than fifty percent women. However, the university administration had one woman dean and few women department chairs. About five years ago, I became dean of The Graduate School and often found myself again the only woman in the room.

Although twenty years had passed since my non-tenured position ended as the only woman in a communication

department, I found myself in the identical situation. A famous picture of Katharine Graham, owner of the *Washington Post*, sitting around a table with all men at a board meeting from the 1960's came to mind. I wondered what the status was at other Jesuit schools for women in leadership positions. Then in 2003, I was invited to present a paper at an Oxford Roundtable about women's issues and studied the status of women at AJCU schools. This essay is based on that paper and data from the *2004-2005 AJCU Directory*.

Methodology

To determine if the status of women in administration in AJCU colleges and universities had improved, a comparison of the number of women in leadership positions between the 1992-93 and 2002-2003 was conducted. Using the *AJCU Directories* for each of those academic years, a determination was made as to the increase or decrease of women in administrative roles. These dates take in the time in which Decree 14 ("Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society") and Decree 13 ("Cooperation with the Laity in Mission") occurred. Positions from president to assistant director were included in the analysis.

Mary E. Beadle is dean of the graduate school at John Carroll University.

Limitations of AJCU Data

Using the *AJCU Directories* as a source of data created some difficulties. Names beginning with initials were not tallied and neither were names like Pat or Dale. If people were listed with two titles, they were included in the higher category. For example, at Georgetown University, the executive vice-president of the School of Law was also listed as the dean of the School of Law.

Additional difficulties concern the positions of department chair and director. The *AJCU Directories* do not list department chairs. Often this position is the entry level position for women interested in academic leadership. The title of director has many meanings. For example, someone may be a director with a large staff and major responsibility in the university or it may mean a faculty member who is directing an academic program.

Since there is such variation in this title, these positions, while they may reveal some information regarding women in leadership, may not be as helpful in determining if there were increases in women in leadership positions. One other caution regarding position descriptions is a presidential position listed at Rockhurst. This title represents the president of research in the College of Nursing, not the president of the institution. Therefore, this position was not included in the analysis of presidential positions.

There is also variation in the reporting of the information to the AJCU offices from the universities. For example, some universities do not report associate or assistant dean positions. Some of these universities were recently contacted for clarification, but the information was inconsistent so it did not prove useful for comparison. One institution stated that they do not release that information. Therefore, this report should be read as a snapshot of AJCU institutions at various points in time, comparing similar data, but not exact descriptions of all leadership positions.

Women in Leadership Positions at AJCU Institutions

Overall from 1992-03 to 2002-03, the total number of women in positions from president to direc-

tors increased eight percent. Individual schools varied from a negative 14 percent (Canisius), to no change (Loyola Marymount and Regis), to an increase of 29 percent (College of the Holy Cross). In 1992-93 there were 984 administrative positions in AJCU institutions and women filled 28 percent of these jobs. In 2002-03 there were 1166 positions and women filled 36 percent of these jobs. In 2004-2005 there were 1181 positions and 38 percent were women.

There are currently no women who serve as president at an AJCU school. However, for the period of the ten-year analysis, the president of University of Detroit Mercy was a woman. In 1992-93, the total number of women in all vice-presidential positions was 35. In 2002-03, there were 100 and 104 in 2004-2005. This represents a significant change in senior level leadership positions. Most of these vice-presidents are in student affairs or development; approximately 14 percent are in academic affairs. This finding is similar to what Maureen Fay reported in her 1999 speech at Jesuit Association of Student Personnel Administrators (JASPA) about her survey of Jesuit institutions.

In 1992-93 there were 81 women in dean positions; in 2002-03 there were 112 and 127 in 2004-2005. In the category of directors there were 154 women listed in 1992-93; in 2002-03 there were 211, and 217 in 2004-2005. In 1999, Fay also reported that there is a higher percentage of women in mid-level administrative positions. As she stated: "the 'lower' the positions are on the 'hierarchy,' the higher the percentage of women who occupy them." These statistics seem to support her observation.

The large numbers of women in director positions is troubling for a number of reasons. Often, directors are not PhD. prepared and are not members of the faculty.

On a university campus, this may lead to credibility problems. The position of "director" is very broadly defined. As previously noted, at some institutions this may include a considerable amount of responsibility;

This report should be read as a snapshot of AJCU institutions at various points in time, comparing similar data, but not exact descriptions of all leadership positions.

"...the 'lower' the positions are on the 'hierarchy,' the higher percentage of women who occupy them."



Saint Joseph's University.

at other institutions it may mean one person running an office with a secretary. Also, directors typically would not sit in senior level meetings where they could have influence on policy and direction.

To see what effect including director had on the results, the ten-year span of data was analyzed excluding director positions. This showed an increase of women in administration of ten percent rather than eight percent. This also changed the total number of women in administration from 22 percent to 32 percent and in 2004-2005 to 34 percent. This re-analysis

indicates a slightly larger percentage of women in mid and upper level management than was indicated when the

director positions were included in the analysis.

Although it is disappointing to see no women presidents and the large number of women in low level administrative positions, there are some encour-

aging signs. In the positions that might be considered the next step, there were the most gains. This includes deans, vice-presidents (other than academic), assistant and associate vice-presidents. In the position of provost, there have been smaller increases.

Does the Glass Ceiling Exist?

A concern of many women is the apparent limit to which they are permitted to move up into the senior levels of administration. This has been referred to as the "glass ceiling." There is some indication that a glass ceiling exists for women at AJCU institutions.

During the 1992-1993 academic year, excluding interim positions, from assistant dean to vice-president, there were 105 women; in 2002-2003, there were 183 in these positions. However, the numbers are not as encouraging for women at the vice presidential level. In the 1992-1993 academic year, for the positions of president, executive vice-president, provost/academic vice-president, excluding interim positions, 15 women held these offices. In 2002-2003, 17 women held these positions.

In 2004-2005, there was a decrease in women in these positions to 14. Of seven executive vice-president/provost positions that were listed, none were held by women in 1992-1993. Of the 28 Jesuit schools, 11 institutions have had or currently have women in this senior position. If a glass ceiling exists, it seems to be situated between the vice-president and executive president positions as the growth below those positions is greater than the growth above. It also appears that it is more difficult for women to advance in academic affairs than other areas of the university.

To determine if AJCU schools are similar in the role of women in administration to other higher educational institutions, other national surveys of women in higher education administration were reviewed. The American Council on Education (ACE) reports that from 1996 to 2001, the percentage of women who are presidents of colleges and universities has more than doubled from 9.5 percent to 21 percent. Despite these gains, women are still under-represented compared the population in the schools. For example, although 40 percent of faculty and senior staff are women, they are only about one-fifth of the nation's colleges and universities presidents. ACE's next survey is due out in 2006. According to an article in *Connections* in 2001, in Jesuit schools, women students make up 56 percent of the student body, women faculty about 30 percent (although some institutions are as high as 56 percent) and women in the administrative staff comprise about 20 percent. To be comparable to the schools included

To be comparable to the schools included in the ACA study, the AJCU schools would need about six women presidents.

in the ACE study, AJCU schools would need about 6 women presidents.

The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) listed 65 women presidents and 78 women who are chief academic officers among its members in 2003. The total membership of ACCU is 198 and there are 16 international members. These statistics indicate that almost 33 percent of those Catholic colleges and universities have women presidents. Numbers include institutions that were founded by women's religious orders and continue to have women as presidents. These national surveys seem encouraging for women wishing to advance in leadership roles and a much higher percentage than either ACE or AJCU schools. To be comparable to the ACCU schools, AJCU schools would need about 9 women presidents.

The numbers indicate an increased presence for women on Jesuit campuses since 1992. However, there does appear to be a glass ceiling for the highest positions, especially in academic affairs. This is especially apparent when the presidential position is compared with ACE and ACCU data. However, numbers do not tell the entire story. Women in Jesuit schools work in a cultural context that can be exclusionary and which cannot be addressed just by increasing numbers of women in leadership positions.

More Than Numbers

In a recent study by Mary Lou Jackson, she found that a growing number of women are changing the culture of Catholic colleges founded by priests and brothers. She conducted in-depth interviews with six women in high-level positions in six Catholic schools from small colleges to large research institutions. One woman stated: "All the gains that have been made have been because individual women have stood up, often by themselves." These women viewed themselves as outsiders and realize they work in schools where they do not share the historical traditions and culture. They know they would have been denied their current position throughout most of the schools' history.

Women administrators at AJCU schools indicate that their institutions have made progress in acknowledging women, but realize that there is need for significant improvement. Alice Hayes wrote in 1993 that the environment of Jesuit schools reflect the male history and traditions, where most decision are made by men, the faculty is mostly men and even statues and pictures for our inspiration are men.

This observation is evident on the John Carroll campus. The most prominent statues are of St. Ignatius and Bishop John Carroll. A wall of fame includes only pictures of Jesuits. Although appropriate, there is no

recognition of women in a visible way. In fact, a few years ago when there was a request by students to add female pictures to the wall, they were stunned with the negative reaction they received. As Maureen Fay stated in 1999, "It is not enough to open the door, ... without being prepared to make changes that indicate a welcome, a sensitivity, a recognition not only of (women's) presence, but also of the contributions that their experiences can add to the texture of academic life."

The Catholic context may also contribute to problems for advancement of women. In 1989, Mary Brabeck stated: "The Catholic church, after all, marginalizes women and explicitly excludes them from the hierar-

chy." In a discussion in 2000 on Catholic intellectual tradition, Ursula King of the University of Bristol reminds us that "Women of the late twentieth century have,...considerable difficulty in identifying with many aspects of the (Catholic) intellectual life as previously conceived. Until very recently, Catholic intellectual life...ha(s) been understood in an entirely andocentric (sic) way because most of this life, throughout most of the history of the church, (it) has been deeply embedded in a rigidly patriarchal framework."

Another influence on women's experience in this culture is to be a minority and to live "at the margins." This may take the form of not fully participating, feeling isolated or "feeling invisible." When you are the minority you "feel your difference" says Hayes. As Brabeck wrote over 12 years ago, she believed Jesuit institutions have problems integrating feminine qualities into the structure of governance. So although women have made gains, cultural barriers may still exist for the full participation of women in decision making and policy change.

The Call to "Get it"

If the glass ceiling is merely one of inequality based on numbers, then over time, promotions and proper oversight can produce results. However, studies indicate that women experience the world in different ways than men and use different leadership styles. Research has also indicated that men in organizations view their leadership styles as the norm and gender-neutral. These differences in perceptions and culture may make the glass ceiling much harder to break.

"All the gains that have been made have been because individual women have stood up, often by themselves."

In a 1996 speech at John Carroll Reverend Howard Gray noted that Decree 14 lays out a threefold plan of action for Jesuits to achieve full collaboration with women; conversion, appreciation of women's work and implementation (actions for change). Gray says this is a call "to get it" and be transformed in life and action. While each institution has its own particular culture and history, individuals at every institution can reflect on the role of women in the life and future direction of the university.

The call to "get it" also implies actions by women. Although not new, these actions take on added importance because of the glass ceiling, especially for academic affairs. First, women need not only be aware of being invisible, they need to share these concerns with other women on campus. Although it may be easier to promote change from a position of authority, formerly all-male institutions have been organized through men's relationships with men and a similar unity among women is an effective means to oppose institutionalized norms that exclude women. Awareness that organizational norms and structures are a result of systems and not individuals is helpful in this dialogue. Norms may subtly favor men even though the woman has more experience or competence. Equality of treatment needs to be perceived as such before it is accepted as a reality. Sharing stories help women to create a new reality. The conversation can also be helpful to individual women so they do not blame themselves, feel incompetent, or lose self confidence.

Get it!

Second, there remains a sub-culture of male groups that Lisa Cahill noted in 1993 and is integrated into the culture of many higher education institutions. These sub-cultures often meet in convenient locations that exclude women. The sub-culture fosters leadership development, ensures future leaders gain appropriate experience, and creates mentoring networks both formal and informal. These inequities need to be seen by the organization as a whole and eliminated or open to all. How this occurs is a real challenge and needs the effort and courage of those in positions of leadership and women to trust each other to risk a difficult dialogue. The reward of a transformed institution makes the risk worthwhile.

Finally, without consistent data, the status of women in administration is difficult to evaluate. Documenting the status of women in leadership positions at AJCU schools needs to be done every year. The AJCU Office could then provide an annual report to our colleges and universities. It is also important that the data which are reported be consistent across institutions for valid comparison. A standard reporting form could be implemented by AJCU that would provide this information and include chairs and members of the Board of Directors.

Breaking through the glass ceiling remains a challenge, but increasing numbers of women in administrative leadership positions at AJCU schools show that it is possible. Breaking through the cultural ceiling to include women in the serious senior decision structure may prove to be more difficult. ■



Fordham University